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ABSTRACT

Impressionistic evidence and the literature suggest that questions of objectives are of little importance in most curriculum discussions; rather, people set forth their own goals and then move on to questions of content and materials--a practice that could be called the politics of curriculum development. The context of the case study reported here is the State of Utah where a large number of teachers are young, with limited teaching experience, and where teacher salaries are extremely low. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to study the role of elementary and secondary social studies teachers in curriculum development. Each of 200 social studies teachers in 3 school districts was interviewed for 2 hours and then observed in the classroom. Themes that guided the research were: motivation for a new curriculum, the role of politics, and concerns of teachers (curriculum, management, resources). This research concluded that in an unequal power relationship those who hold power often get their way and that teachers often have little actual voice in what concerns them. Many of the teachers in this study felt that they have legitimate rights to change new curriculum proposals to meet their teaching situations and that they should not be treated as mere transmitters of ideas. The current state of affairs does not foster teachers' critical thinking and questioning. As it is, teacher involvement in curriculum development provides legitimation for ideas already held by others. (AMH)

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THE TEACHER AND THE POLITICS OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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This case study deals with the role of the teacher in the politics of curriculum development in the State of Utah. The state of Utah in 1987 published a new core curriculum for all schools. It is the role played by teachers in the politics of designing and developing the new core curriculum that this paper deals with.

Impressionistic evidence and the literature suggest that questions of objectives are of little importance in most curriculum discussions. Rather, people propound their particular goals (their "platform," to use Walker's term) and then move on to questions of content and materials. At curriculum committee meetings, discussion is influenced by countless forces that have little to do with the curriculum ostensibly under discussion. In periods of scarcity, the rational approach to change, if-then-logic gives way to a more political logic of "what's in it for me?" or to a "trading mentality" (Walker, 1985; Fullan et. al., 1990).

Members of curriculum committees bargain, negotiate, argue and trade while also paying attention to external influences. Curriculum-making is a hybrid of organizational process and governmental politics. As Shipman put it:

> Curriculum development does not proceed through a clear cycle from a statement of objectives to an evaluation of the learning strategies used...Horse trading and horse sense are the concrete curriculum science, not the clinical alignment of means with ends that is the official version (1972).

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Walker's comment remains true, at least of social studies: "Despite a decade and a half of unprecedented activity in curriculum development, we know very little about the method of operation of curriculum development groups" (Walker, 1971,1990)).This is because subject specialists are primarily concerned with questions of subject matter, curriculum and pedagogy. They are too busy serving on curriculum committees to spend time also studying them. Curriculum specialists, for their part, have their own preoccupations, and so the interface between general curriculum theory and subject matter curriculum development has been largely unexplored.

We do not know, for example, except in local, common sense ways, who are the curriculum decision-makers, who are the gatekeepers, who are asked to participate on state committees and why they are selected. Nor do we know anything about their " platforms". We know that most curriculum committees meet in difficult circumstances:

> The task forces or committees which develop the guidelines are formally representative of different groups. The fact that there is selectivity on committees is only a small part of the problem. Unrealistic time-lines (politically driven and in many ways inevitable) value conflicts within the committees and certainly outside them, and insufficient resources, skills or time to develop details and a reluctance to do so--they all add up to an inauspicious start for many guidelines (Fullan, 1982: 243).

What we do not have is substantial empirical evidence of any of this in concrete settings. Gaynor and DuVall (19/?) after extensive review of the "State of the Art" concluded that it was predominantly unsubstantiated empirically. Walker (1990) has argued that a viable curriculum theory must be

naturalistic, that it must be derive from analytic descriptions of what actually happens when curricula are developed. There is therefore a good deal of potential of both theoretical and practical significance in investigating such areas. General curriculum theory can be enhanced by closer attention to what happens in practice, i.e., the politics of curriculum development.

Context

The unique context in which this study took place needs to be analyzed. Utah has the largest school age population in proportion to the rest of the country. A large number of the teachers are young, between 22-28 years of age with limited teaching experience. The salaries of teachers, especially elementary, are extremely low--the 48th lowest out of 50 states. Even when cost of living adjustments are considered, the starting salary for a teacher is low, which mitigates against the best and brightest people entering the teaching profession. Certainly, this is not an ideal situation to institute radical changes.

METHODOLOGY

Design

By doing triagulation (Murphy, 1980) qualitative and quantative methods were used in this case study. The use of the qualitiative research method was necessary because it provided a framework whereby teacher-participants, administrators, curriculum specialists and non-participants could candidly express their opinions in their own terms. This is important because "in order to capture participants in their own terms; one must learn their

categories for rendering explicable and coherent the flux of raw reality" (Clifford, 1988). Thus an attempt was made to view events from the perspective of participants and non-participants.

As each individual in curriculum development is treated as a unique entity, with its own particular meaning and constellation of relationships, it was important to use a methodology that brings this out. The qualitative methodology does that as it makes it possible to study people in situ. Where necessary for clarity and understanding, both qualitative and quantitative data were combined (Pelto and Pelto, 1978; Patton, 1987).

Data Sources

Because of the broad nature of the core curriculum, i.e., all school subjects were revised, and the large numbers of teachers affected (an estimated 5000 teachers) covering virtually the whole state of Utah, a decision was made to limit the research to social studies curriculum development for both elementary and secondary schools. Even with this limitation, there were more than 200 teachers affected by the development of the social studies core curriculum.

Instrumentation

A stratified random sampling of the 200 social studies teachers was conducted. Eighty teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists were interviewed at various settings. Each teacher was interviewed for two hours at his/her school, followed in many instances by observations in individual classrooms

where the teacher had been for at least a year. Open-ended questions were used, which provided each interviewer the opportunity to elaborate on answers. The interviewee were tape-recorded and transcribed at the end of each day. Notes were also taken at each interview in order to capture the essence of the conversation. Both elementary and secondary school teachers were interviewed cutting across grades and subjects. Sample questions included:

1. On which curriculum development committee did you participate ?
3. How were teachers selected to serve on the various curriculum committees? (probe).
2. What was your reason for participating?
3. Were your reasons for participating consistent with your experience on the
5 What were the motivating factors that led to the development of the recent core-curriculum?
6. How did the present core evolve? Who were the driving forces behind it? (probe).
7. Was the previous core evaluated before it was replaced?
8. Were issues of general concern to teachers addressed? If yes, how?
4. What rewards/satisfaction did you derive from participating?
9. What were some of the drawbacks to your participation? Could they have been avoided ?

9. After your participation, did you communicate with anyone about your work?
10 If yes, what was the form of communication and how many teachers were involved?
11. Given the choice, will you serve on future curriculum development committee? If yes, why? If no, why not?
12. Why is it that few teachers participate on curricular development committees? What evidence do you have for this?
13. What advice will you give to teachers who want to participate on curriculum development committees?
14. Are the ideas and concerns of teachers taken seriously on such committees? If yes, Give examples; if no, give examples
15 What role did politics play in devising the new core? What were the various pressure groups involved? What was their involvement?
16. How many trade-offs took place between interested pressure groups?
17. Do you feel that local school districts should have the prerogative of setting up their own programs based on local needs and preferences?
18. Are statewide programs and standards necessary to ensure uniform quality of education for students across the state?
19. How do state-level curriculum guides and mandates affect the role of the teacher at the local level?

This research was done in three school districts. Proximity and economic reasons necessitated the choice of the three districts, even though all 40 districts were involved in the design of the core curriculum.

Data Analysis:

There are few cannons for good analysis of combined quantitative and qualitative data. For this case study, the research drew on the work of Patton (1987) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). Interview notes were coded around the conceptual framework and survey questions, and then put into computer files (XY WRITE V word processing program). Notes were entered as one or several sentences, each with codes attached. A summary sheet, reviewing the interview notes, organized by codes, was done to provide a completely intergrated picture of the data. This too was entered into the computer data base. In order to speedily retrieve each data, tags were assigned according to interview - principals, teachers and dates of interviews. All data files were stored in a data base, where search and retrieval could be done according the codes, data or combination of words.

For the purposes of analysis, data was retrieved with reference to questions; sources (principals, teachers, date) and codes. Any materials related to teacher participation in the core curriculum politics, opinions about the core curriculum, perceived expectations of the core curriculum, practicality of the core and fears and uncertainty about the core; teacher's view of what they saw as important about the core, anticipated and unanticipated impact of the core were retrieved. Because questions of judgement, value and perceptions vary somewhat from teacher to teacher,

principal to principal, an eclectic approach was applied during data analysis in order to achieve inter-role agreement. The point of convergence between qualitative data and quantitative data was critically examined. This analytic device is well-suited for developing a cumulative picture of what actually happens in individual cases (Miles and Huberman, 1984).Quotations included in the description and analysis were codified by numbers so that the anonymity of interviewees has preserved.The report of the data for the study is given in both qualitatitive form and tables.

Results

Table I is a demographic breakdown of the teachers involved in the study--those who served on the curriculum committees and those who did not. The majority of the teachers were from elementary schools and had more than ten years experience. Neither predominance of elementary teachers nor the large female population adversely affected the results of this study.

Table I. Teachers' Demographic Data (N = 80)

Sex	
Male	30
Female	50
Total =	80

Class Size	
1 - 10	0
11 - 20	5
21 - 30	35
31 - 40	30
Over 40	10
Total =	80

Teaching Experience	
0 - 15	
5 - 12	
10 - 25	
Over 14	
Total =	80

School Type	
Elementary	49
Secondary	31
Total =	80

Age Range Taught	
Under 11	21
11 - 13	29
14 - 16	20
Over 16	10
Total =	80

The results have been arranged according to themes that guided the research. A thematic breakdown of the results covering motivation, role of politics and concens of teachers follows:

Motivation for a New Curriculum

From the interviews, it appears as if the justification for the new curriculum can be located within the most recent round of reform proposals in education. Spurred by several highly critical reports on education in the country, sponsored by corporate and state commissions (e.g. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and individual writings such as Goodlad's (1984) A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future, Utah decided to revise its curricula for elementary and secondary schools. Underlining many of the reports, beginning with A Nation at Risk, is the "crisis of excellence" in public education. The thrust of the argument seems to be that schools are not adequately serving the present socio-economic and political system. Perceived mediocrity among both teachers and students, the poor scores on standardized tests, the high drop-out rates, especially among minority and economically disadvantaged students, and the difficulty of retaining the best teachers are pointed out as indications that something is fundamentally wrong. Calls have been made for improvements in the quality of teaching schools as well as teacher education. One proposed solution to the perceived problem is that of providing a core curriculum for all students, thus dealing with the problem of

excellence and equity at the same time. Accordingly the State Board of Education stated:

> The charges signal a major move to tighter accountability for what is taught and how well students are learning, as well as to demand more work for graduation for high school and to identify a required core curriculum of study at each grade level. (State document).

The major changes was the increase of units of work for graduation from Utah high schools to 24 (15 gneral core units plus nine required elective units) and also specifying a 12 unit requirement for the seventh and eighth grade middle school level. Prior to 1987, statewide requirements started out that each student in grades ten through twelve must earn a minimum of 15 units of credit, with local school districts given the option to require more if they so desired. Assessment of student mastery of the core curriculum were to be at grades three, six, eight, ten and twelve. A minimum course description standards for all required courses to insure educational quality.

For Utah, the decision to develop a core curriculum was based partly on the pressure to respond to the percieved educational crisis and the need to standardize graduation requirements within the state. The following comments from the officials of the State Board of Education attest to this:

> The core started with the Nation-at-Risk (sic) report that was issued from Washington, D.C. to all the states; Utah created two Blue Ribbon committees--one created by former Governor Matheson and the other by the State Board of Education. The essential mandate for both committees was to review the reports to see how they apply to Utah specifically. (State Board Official).[1]

> The establishment of a core curriculum was part of the reform movement after the report of the National Commission on Excellence. Utah had been without a common curriculum for some time, and it was felt from 1983 that a core was essential. With the Bowery report and some of the writings in the field of curriculum, e.g., the Goodlad book, it was felt by the Board that the time was opportune to have a core curriculum. In this regard a committee was appointed composed of some educationists, but the majority were lay public, to give recommendations to the State Board as to what action Utah needed to take to respond to those reports. (State Board Official).[2]

From the teachers' point of view, it seemed that they were not dissatisfied with existing curricula, although some reservations were expressed. Typical comments were:

> The State Board of Education mandated a new core. We were asked to participate in establishing it. For me there is nothing new in this, in that every five years or so, new sets of curricula are introduced in the schools. (Teacher, Jordan District).[3]

> I first knew about a core curriculum when my principal asked whether I wanted to be part of a team writing the state's new curriculum. Because of my interest in curriculum development, I not only agreed to participate, but I read some of the reports on excellence that were published that year. (Teacher, Granite District).[4]

> I knew about the various reports on education, but as far as I was concerned, the curriculum that was being used in my class was sufficient. Periodic changes in curricula are not new to me, having spent 20 years in the service, nothing surprises me anymore (Teacher, Salt Lake District).[5]

The Role of Politics

The next theme discussed was the role politics played in devising the new core. With all the pressure from the nation's capital to reform the school system, it was interesting to discover local politicans' view of education

within the state. To gauge such feelings, some members of the State Board of Education were interviewed. The following are a representative sample of their views:

> Pressures always existed as what is to be included or not in curriculum, e.g., the problems of AIDS, sex education. As a public body, the Board listens to various pressure groups, sorts out various views and come up with a policy that benefits everyone. (Board Member).[6]

> The Board came under tremendous pressure to institute a core curriculum, from politicans as well as other pressure groups. The plethora of reports at the national level made politicans and others in the state anxious to be part of the new trend in education excellence. (Board Member).[7]

From the above comments, it would seem that once the national reports were issued, Utah had to do something to reflect the new concerns about education. This was done even though some school districts had spent considerable amounts of time and resources to revise their curricula only a year or so before the reports. Indeed, this was acknowledged by one of the curriculum specialists working for the Board, "Granite, Salt Lake City, Jordan Districts had gone through a rather extensive curriculum development process prior to initiating the core. A concession was made to them to use their curricula provided they correlated with the core" (State Board Official).[8] In interviews with many of the teachers in the three districts, their frustration at having, in many cases, to redo what they had done previously was apparent. Some of the teachers raised the issue of waste of resources in duplicating previous efforts.

> I was involved in the district-wide curriculum revision last year. This year I was recommended to participate in the statewide curriculum development. From my experience on both committees, I will say that the work was duplicated. (Teacher, Salt Lake City District).[9]
>
> For me there is no major difference between what was produced here locally and what the state came up with. Because of this, I feel strongly that the resources spent at the state level could have been better spent, e.g., on teacher salaries, which are among the lowest in the country. (Teacher, Granite School District).[10]
>
> The core curriculum is a good document, but when there is already something in place that fulfills the same purpose, one wonders at the wisdom of policy-makers. The resources spent on the core could have been spent on something else. (Teacher, Jordan District).[11]

A word of caution is necessary here. In follow-up interviews with members of the State Board of Education, the issue of duplication was raised. Many of the curriculum specialists pointed out that not all school districts were equal in terms of resources and personnel. For poorer school districts, with very few specialists, resources were not available to develop a core curriculum of their own. The State Board was the only body that could provide such a document. Besides, the core is meant to be the minimum requirement for all school districts.

Concerns of Teachers

The issue of teachers in the development of the core was next discussed. Since the focus of the research was teachers' role in curriculum development, most of the remainder of the paper will deal with this. A series of questions were raised about teachers which are combined here for clarity and space.

From the foregoing comments from teachers on the core, it is clear that the core was not developed specifically to meet any major concern of teachers. All indicators point to the role of teachers as passive participants in a process over which they had no control. This was contrary to the reform proposed by Goodlad and others who advocated teacher ownership in both the process and products of curriculum development (Goodlad, 1984). Given the issues, were teachers able or willing to raise concerns that they felt were important in developing curriculum or did they just rubberstamp what the State Board wanted? In order to arrive at a candid opinion on this issue, a prior question had to be asked: How were teachers selected to serve on the various curriculum committees and what, if any, rewards were given to them? Depending upon how the selection is done, teachers' input could be important. According to State Board officials and curriculum specialists, teachers were selected in two ways. The subject specialists at the Board were given authority to select teachers they wanted to serve in their particular areas--the idea was that having worked with the school, the subject specialists were in a position to identify competent teachers (teacher leaders in each area). Using this method, a good number of teachers were asked to serve on various committees.

The vast majority of teachers, however, were selected through the school districts. Letters were sent to all 40 school districts asking them to nominate teachers who are capable and willing to serve on the state curriculum committees. Out of the pool of names sent, subject specialists and curriculum experts selected their committees. As the curriculum specialist at the Board

put it, "Selection had to be done from the names of teachers submitted. For example, Alpine School District gave the names of 19 teachers to work in various areas. With 40 school districts in the state, selection had to be done for the committees to work efficiently and smoothly." This statement was borne out by the teachers who were interviewed. Many got involved because of their personal interest in a given subject, although a handful served mainly because they were asked. Monetary considerations did not play any significant part in the decision to participate. Teachers were paid, minimum per diem, plus transportation, not enough to create excessive demand to participate on committees.

One of the major issues of concern to teachers discussed at most committee meetings was the time factor--whether there would be enough time to accomodate all the new requirements, in addition to existing ones. For example, one of the new requirements was to teach skills in physical education, health, art, music and computer science. This was of particular concern to elementary teachers who were being asked to teach skills that others taught before. Sample comments in this regard are appropriate:

> In addition to the basics which were emphasized previously, we are now asked to teach all these other subjects with the same hours in a day! (Teacher, Jordan School District).[12]
>
> The core has added more work to my teaching without any compensation. With the introduction of assessment of student mastery of the core to grades 3, 6, etc., my work load has increased. (Teacher, Granite School District).[13]

> While I have no objection to the students learning the new skills in elementary school, I don't think that I am well-qualified to do a good job at music or art to the level that the state wants. (Teacher, Salt Lake City District).[14]

To the question of what actually happened when the various committees met and whether teachers' concerns were taken into consideration, a variety of views was expressed. It seems that not much attention was paid to questions of whose interest schools serve, power relation in school organization, or even philosophical issues. The impression from interviewing those involved was that teachers and others involved saw themselves as under pressure to produce a document that would satisfy the powers that be. Thus philisophical, epistemological, and methodological arguments had little place in the deliberations. Because of time constraints and the large numbers of people on each committee, a thorough discussion of issues was not always forthcoming. Some of the teachers complained:

> Even though we raised issues that were of concern for classroom teachers, for example the appropriateness of certain materials, we were told that they will be considered later on, but that never happened. (Teacher, Granite School District).[15]

> The concern that I raised was in connection with large class sizes vis-a-vis the new requirements for graduation. The increase to 24 core units for graduation instead of the previous 18 puts additional pressure on the teacher, without adequate resources. (Teacher, Salt Lake CityDistrict).[16]

When the issue of teachers' concerns (Table II) at meetings was raised, such as resources, reward system and class size, many of the specialists and other Board of Education officials indicated that flexibility was built into the system. This means that in some areas teachers are free to make selection as to what they want; for example, in social studies initially it was proposed that three credits in specific aeras (History, Political Science and

Table II. Main areas of concerns: curriculum, managerial, resources, with breakdowns.

Frequencies and Ranks of Most Important Factors to Teachers

Teachers (N = 80)

Concerns	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Curriculum			
1. Content	70	75	3.0
2. Material	76	88	2.5
3. Objectives specify	70	63	4.5
4. Instruction	77	95	1.0
Managerial			
5. Time	76	88	2.5
6. Class size/control	70	75	3.5
7. Class routines	70	63	4.0
8. Physicl environment	40	50	5.5
Resources			
9. Teaching materials	76	88	2.0
10. Text	70	63	4.5
11. Media	40	50	5.0
12. Library	40	50	5.5
13. Salary	76	88	2.5
14. Leave of absence	70	75	3.5

economics) were required for high school graduation. Because some of the teachers objected, the three credits were changed to include any social studies area, with the final choice being left with each district. This,however, created a problem. Whenever a student who had completed one district's set of requirements transferred; s/he was often required to also meet the new district's requirements for social studies. Steps are now being taken to provide some form of reciprocity between districts for students who transfer before completing their high school education.

The question of reward for all of the teachers interviewed was not in salary increases but in what Doyle and Ponder (1977-1978) referred to as the "practical ethic," i.e., promotions, improved student response, more stimulating learning conditions, personal satisfaction and cost. Costs include amount of energy, time, learning new skills and procedures. Teachers in this study felt that the cost in time, difficulty and trauma involved in learning new skills is not adequately compensated. Such attitudes affect how the new curriculum was implemented.

Table II outlines teachers concerns, (the main ones being curriculum, managerial, resources) the percentage of teachers who raised them, and how important such concerns were. From the data, instruction and time to teach were of paramount concern to teachers, followed by teaching materials. Class size was frequently mentioned as an area of concern and as Table I illustrats the majority of teachers were teaching classes of 31-40 pupils.

The final core curriculum that was produced covers all subjects in K-12, with general core and options. In elementary K-6, the core included language arts,

mathematics, science, social studies, arts, healthy lifestyles and information technology. An optional subject is foreign language. Between grades 7-8, 12 units are required to move to high school, where 24 units are required for graduation. Of the 24 units required, 15 core subjects, such as language arts, science, and 9 units are electives. According to the state document, the core represents those standards of learning that are essential for all students. They provide foundations for future learning (Utah Core Curriculum, 1987).

Conclusion

Given the foregoing tables, comments, and observations, what conclusion can be drawn on teacher participation in the politics of curriculum development in Utah?

This research points out that in an unequal power relationship, those who hold power often get their way. The research points out that teachers are less powerful than the state bureaucrats who decided that they wanted a new core curriculum and got it. Whether the core itself can achieve the ultimate goal of the designers of the curriculum, "excellence in education," is open to debate. When issues of concerns to teachers (i.e., personal cost, practicality of the change in the classroom, fears and uncertainties associated with the change) are ignored or teachers are "used" to legitimate ideas of their supervisors, the implementation of the new change becomes difficult and institutionalization almost impossible. Teachers should not be involved in a

charade whereby they are brought into the curriculum planning process for appearances sake when decisions have already been made by others. From this study, there are strong indicators that teachers would adopt change proposals to meet their standard teaching style and behaviors. Many of the teachers felt that they have legitimate rights to change new curriculum proposals to meet their teaching situtation and that they should not be treated as mere transmitters of ideas.

For teachers to be real professionals in the field, the system needs to offer concessions that will make them so. At the present time, it does not seem that such concessions are forthcoming. Teachers need to critically reflect on their roles in the schooling process and make decisions that serve the interest of the students they teach. The status quo does not seem to favor such critical thinking and questioning. Teachers' political power has not been harnessed to address the issue. For the forseeable future, teachers will continue to perform to the tune of more powerful forces within the education establishment. Such pressures adversely affect teacher's receptivity to any proposed change that in some way is at variance with teacher's values, attitudes and behaviors.

The general result from this research is that teachers are not treated as equal when it comes to the politics of curriculum development. Teacher involvement in curriculum development is seen as providing legitimation for ideas that others have already. Teacher opinions, concerns, and fears are on the whole treated with benign interest. In the politics of curriculum

development, teachers are treated as junior players and their role is defined accordingly. It seems that some curriculum decisions at many levels are made under tremendous pressure of time and resources, with a result that only a cursory examination of the merits of alternatives are examined. This certainly was the case of the Utah Core Curriculum. Since every curriculum change demands a change from teacher (changes in context, purpose or form, revision of class activities to meet the new changes), their concerns about what works in a classroom should be paramount in curriculum committee deliberations.

NOTES

1. Interview with Social Studies Specialist, September 28, 1988.
2. Interview with Curriculum Specialist, State Board of Education, October, 1987.
3. Interview with teacher, Jordan School District, May 8, 1987.
4. Interview with teacher, Granite School District, September 21, 1987.
5. Interview with teacher, Salt Lake School District, September 14, 1987.
6. Interview with Vice-Chairman, Board of Education, November 13, 1988.
7. Interview with Board member, November 19, 1987.
8. Interview with Social Studies Specialist, November 19, 1987.
9. Interview with teacher, Salt Lake School District, November 25, 1987.
10. Interview with teacher, Granite School District, November 30, 1987.
11. Interview with teacher, Jordan School District, December 2, 1987.
12. Interview with teacher, Jordan School District, December 4, 1988.
13. Interview with teacher, Granite School District, November 23, 1987.
14. Interview with teacher, Salt Lake School District, December 10, 1987.
15. Interview with teacher, Granite School District, October 19, 1987.
16. Interview with teacher, Salt Lake School District, October 28, 1987.

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